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### **Review of *Empire of Scrounge: Inside the Urban Underground of Dumpster Diving, Trash Picking, and Street Scavenging*. Jeff Ferrell. Reviewed by Robert D. Leighninger, Jr.**

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discussion in earlier chapters. However, they do not seem necessary since they were described in previous chapters. Chapters in Part III are bibliographies. The references are useful resource material on a wide variety of topics on orphanages, foster care, adoption, multicultural aspects and controversies in adoption practice.

The main value of this book is the synthesis of a great deal of information available in other sources into historical periods and topical categories. The book will probably be of most interest to child welfare practitioners, prospective foster and adoptive parents, and undergraduates who know little about the history of orphanages, foster care and adoption. Quite surprisingly, Lela Costin's extensive work on the history of child welfare in the U.S. and Ruth McRoy's longitudinal study on adoption were not cited in the text, although each author was listed in the bibliography. Research was not included on the outcomes of children in birth, foster and adoptive families. While the largest numbers of adoptions in the U.S. are by step-parents and relatives, these adoptions were only mentioned and should have been discussed in some detail. The odd organization and format of the book were somewhat distracting to this reviewer.

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Jeff Ferrell, *Empire of Scrounge: Inside the Urban Underground of Dumpster Diving, Trash Picking and Street Scavenging*. New York: New York University Press, 2006. \$22.00 paperback.

Social workers have discovered ethnography, to the benefit of neither so far. To some it seems an excuse not to worry about rigorous research. To others it seems a way to fancy up open-ended interviews or participant observations, perfectly legitimate methods not in need of cosmetics. Real ethnographers immerse themselves in a culture for months, sometimes years; they don't just visit occasionally. Calling a two-hour interview an ethnography is like calling two notes a symphony or Twinkies® a balanced diet.

At the other end of the spectrum there is the problem of ethnographers becoming so immersed in the culture that they lose any outside perspective on it. It's called "going native." Jeff Ferrell is the real thing. He was a full time scrounger—someone who derives the material necessities of life from the waste and discards of others—for eight months, and a part-timer for years before and after. He is neither a cultural tourist nor a wannabe native, yet he presents an entirely different challenge to assessing his research. He has decided to recreate the culture in himself, making no structured attempt to describe and assess the lives of his fellow scroungers, in fact avoiding contact with them (except by accident). There are plenty of these happenstance encounters, but there are no rounded portraits, only snapshots on the run. This is more an exercise in autobiography than an ethnography.

As Ferrell readily admits, he may not be a remotely typical citizen of the "empire of scrounge." He has an employed partner who pays his mortgage and utility bills, covers his health care expenses, and feeds him. After a hot, gritty day of prospecting and mining, he has a hot shower, a sound roof, and a soft bed waiting for him. He may have fixed the plumbing, patched the roof, and built the bed from scrounged materials, but he has a home. He speculates that other scroungers may be like him, but he has no idea if this is true.

Ferrell pays little attention to food. He claims that, had he wanted to, he could have sustained himself on scrounged food. But this disinterest also must set him apart from the average scrounger. More important, we get hardly any idea about how the shadow economy actually works. We know that he collects scrap metal, for he discloses prices salvage yards pay for different categories of aluminum and later records the proceeds of a single haul; but, perhaps because his partner is covering most of his cash needs, he never tells us how much income he is able to realize this way on a regular basis.

We know he has occasional yard sales, however, these seem to be exercises in charity rather than income generation. He sometimes sells valuable finds to dealers, but about this he is annoyingly coy. He sells a cache of old doll clothes and, he says, "I walk out with, well, enough cash to keep me going for a while (p. 50)." Mostly, though, he gives things away or stores

them in his shed.

His shed seems to be bursting with things he can't or hasn't yet used, particularly tools. He finally admits, "I was a junky for tools, and the empire is an endless fix (p. 104)." This casts an interesting light on a quote buried in the footnote, perhaps waiting to be scrounged. Says another chronicler of the empire, "All the dumpster divers I have known come to the point of trying to acquire everything they touch (p. 211)." Have we moved from autobiography to psychopathology?

One goal of this book is to astound the reader with the quantity and quality of what our consumer civilization discards. In that Ferrell succeeds admirably. This is a book of lists. Hardly a paragraph passes, much less a whole page, without a list of treasures the latest trash pile has yielded. After the 25<sup>th</sup> list, the point has been made. By 50<sup>th</sup>, the excitement of a new discovery has long since faded.

Another goal is, or should be, to tell us how the citizens of the empire can survive. In the middle of the book Ferrell states, amazingly, that they can't. Does this mean that they die rapidly and are replaced by an endless supply of impoverished citizens? Ferrell offers no vignettes of mortality, but since he doesn't go looking, we don't know. On the next to last page, Ferrell confesses that the book is "shambling scholarship," not any kind of "thoroughgoing project." It is a collection of stories, spun out with only the loosest connection to organizing themes. The closest we get to disciplined ethnography is the discovery that there are three mores in the empire: the first scrounger to the trash pile has first dibs, leave the trash neater than you found it, and take only what you need (a principle he regularly violates). Even at the practical level, we get little information on the techniques of successful scrounging. A few appear at the very end of the book. As a veteran scrounger myself, perhaps I was expecting too much.

Criminology is Ferrell's academic speciality, and there are many passing observations of how simple attempts to cope with poverty are being progressively criminalized. He succeeds in igniting a simmering anger that a more careful analysis might have fanned into a proper rage, producing a genuine classic work that one quoted reviewer declared it. Instead, it is a self-indulgent ramble through what could be the twilight of

our civilization, undertaken by a very interesting and likeable person, who is hoping, as he puts it, to come upon a moment "of improvisational jazz when shared musical structure explodes into insight and emotion (p. 204)." However, such moments, in jazz or ethnography, don't just happen by accident. Serious jazz musicians don't just jam, they also "shed," which means practice a lot in the woodshed.

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Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006. \$29.95 paperback.

In her intelligent, creative and highly readable study, Laura Pulido demonstrates the value of a comparative analysis that respects the complex dynamics of organizing within and across race and class enough to convey not only the strengths and benefits, but also the limitations and pitfalls of such collective action. This work can be read on a number of levels—a study of racial identity mobilization, a history of the New Left, a narrative of indigenous leadership development, or a testimony to the dramatic potency of radical analyses of societal inequities. Through whatever lens it is read, Pulido has made an elegant and vital addition to our understanding of multicultural social change efforts.

The core theoretical framework for this study, as explicated in Part I, is collective racial identity formation, specifically how a racial/ethnic group comes to realize and then act on its common interests, how that group negotiates class differences and gender relations, and how that group chooses to work with other disenfranchised populations (if at all). In tracing the development of radical Third World organizing in greater Los Angeles, Pulido focuses on the Black Panther Party (BPP), El Centro de Accion Social y Autonomo (CASA), and East Wind (Japanese American collective). In the early chapters, Pulido provides the historical, economic and geographic contexts for the comparative case studies, noting that the different ways in